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Published by the Division of Public Affairs
United Nations Development Programme
One UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017

Vol. 8, no. 11, 5 June 1995

New Directions for UNDP Highlighted at Resident Coordinator Meeting

Editor's note: After more than seven years in print, **update** will be incorporated into new UNDP information products, in both elctronic and print form. Readers outside the UNDP family may watch for UNDP "Flash" on the Internet.

Over the coming years, the shape of development assistance is expected to change markedly as globalization of economies, trade, communications and technology continues to increase, and as poverty and localized conflict pose ever more serious challenges. For the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other development assistance organizations, this means a need for more flexibility in operations, better focused programmes and closer ties to non-governmental organizations and other elements of civil society, according to experts, donors and others who met with 18 veteran UNDP Resident Representatives in Turin, Italy at a training seminar that concluded on 19 May.

The resident representatives, also UN resident coordinators in their respective programme countries, looked forward to the year 2005 and saw a need for real change within UNDP. "The greatest danger is to underestimate change and understate turbulence," said Jehan Raheem, until recently Resident Representative in Myanmar. This central thought was embraced by others at the workshop as well. "It is crucial that UN agencies change, take their niche role and operate in an effective way," said John Machin, head of the United Nations and Commonwealth Department of the UK's Overseas Development Administration. Mr. Machin added that in the future ODA would expect more focused work and more reporting on the impact of development activities from UNDP.

Speaking to the group at the International Training Centre in Turin, which is administered by the ILO, UNDP Administrator James Gustave Speth called for a United Nations in which the funds and programmes of the common system agencies work closely together to achieve the benefits of a unified system. "The United Nations simply cannot survive and flourish as an institution unless it is very strong in development and in international economic activities at the governmental and at the operational levels", Mr. Speth said.

Mr. Speth reminded workshop participants of UNDP's goals to provide operational and intellectual leadership and to act as a unifying and catalyzing organization for the purpose of holding the UN together. "Whatever the future of development cooperation will be", Mr. Speth said, "UNDP has to be prepared for different alternatives and must genuinely be constructive."

While change is the key word, the UNDP Administrator said that the organization will remain "a field-based organization, and its programming country-driven. Its headquarters will

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continue to service its field operations, and not vice versa."

One cause for the decline in resources for development assistance, Mr. Speth said, is that funds for emergency relief have roughly doubled in recent years. Today, almost half of the UN's ODA is devoted to emergencies. Another cause, the UNDP Administrator said, is the flawed perception that, by and large, the developing world is progressing and if a few countries are not doing well, "it's their own fault".

Admitting that he is probably in the minority, Mr. Speth said that he is optimistic that the G-7 will break the downward trend of ODA and that sooner or later it would begin to increase again, coming back in different forms, guises, and under different labels.

The UNDP Administrator used the occasion to reiterate his call for a new framework for development cooperation, and noted that UNDP had already begun working for this goal. He cited, as one example, its contribution to building "natio al partnership facilities", which are jointly managed by individual countries, UNDP, civil society and the donor community. UNDP's *Human Development Report*, he added, has in effect been building a new framework "on a daily basis".

UNDP's top priority, Mr. Speth said, is poverty elimination. He urged resident coordinators to move aggressively to make UNDP the anti-poverty institution of the UN. At the same time, he said, they should look to identify development opportunities that underlie crises situations. "The UN is recognized as the world's crisis response institution, and as coordinators we have to provide preventive and curative development as a complement to emergency relief."

The first of its kind exclusively for UN resident coordinators, the workshop was part of a series of training activities being carried out by the Turin Centre for the United Nations system, with the aim of strengthening collaboration and coordination among senior UN field representatives. It has so far brought together some 70 country teams, and more than 400 participants, in 14 such workshops on field coordination.

UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board begins annual session today

The Executive Board of UNDP and UNFPA will hold its annual session in New York from 5 to 16 June 1995. On its agenda are a number of key items, including the finalizing of future programming arrangements for UNDP. Deliberations within the Board on the main components of UNDP's programming framework have been going on for the past year. The new approach will respond to a number of legislative mandates and development cooperation realities, most importantly the goals and focus areas endorsed by the Board last year in Document DP/1994/39 on "initiatives for change". Topics for discussion under this item include the overall programming situation and resource allocation.

The 36-member Board, chaired by Ambassador Zbigniew Maria Wlosowicz of Poland, will also take up the progress report of the Administrator on implementation of decision 94/14 on the future of UNDP. UNDP's aim to "reinvent" itself and to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations system to deliver more effective assistance began with the Board's endorsement of the Administrator's proposals in June 1994. The Board will review the use of UNDP resources in relation to such key goals as promoting sustainable human development and strengthening United Nations coordination at the country and global levels.

The Administrator of UNDP and the Executive Director of UNFPA will report to the Board on their respective activities during the past year. The Board will also take up matters relating to the United Nations Development Fund for Women; the role of UNDP in the implementation of the United Nations' New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s; technical cooperation among developing countries; the United Nations Office for Project Services; the *Human Development Report*; and UNFPA country programmes.

Stockholm Donor's Briefing on Afghanistan focuses on relationship between humanitarian assistance and long-term rehabilitation

A UNDP-organized conference in Stockholm, Sweden (1-2 June) briefed international donors on the urgent situation that continues to prevail in Afghanistan and on the important relationship between on-going humanitarian assistance programmes and rehabilitation. Hosted by the Government of Sweden, the conference, which brought together representatives from some 70-80 multilateral and bilateral donor agencies, NGOs and UN organizations, was the first of it kind to brief the international community both on the overall situation in Afghanistan and on the need for a smooth transition between ongoing humanitarian assistance programmes and longer-term rehabilitation, reconstruction and development. It preceded the next Consolidated Appeal for Afghanistan — now being planned for October — and helped to focus donor attention on the longer term needs of the war-torn country, which extend far beyond emergency assistance.

Presently, most bilateral aid extended to Afghanistan is still funded from emergency, not development assistance budgets. The meeting therefore provided an important forum for the international community to discuss ways of moving from humanitarian assistance initiatives to programmes that promote both sustainable development and the country's reconstruction. At the same time, however, the need for emergency humanitarian assistance continues, as the challenge to provide for the day-to-day needs of the country's internally displaced and vulnerable groups remains a pressing priority.

It is envisaged that the UN-sponsored peace process will pave the way for longer-term programmes of reconstruction in Afghanistan, a country that has been debilitated by conflict and war for more than 15 years and which ranks third from last in the Human Development Index. While conflict still rages in some areas of Afghanistan, including surrounding parts of the capital, UNDP, the UN system and many NGOs have successfully pursued rehabilitation programmes in those parts of the country that are peaceful, assisting many rural communities, towns and villages. A number of these programmes were highlighted at the conference as a way of introducing initiatives that are currently operational in Afghan communities, which might present opportunities for further donor inputs or involvement.

For its part, UNDP's programme in Afghanistan has focused on rural rehabilitation as a key theme. It's current US$18 million programme is working to improve irrigation systems and seed production facilities, veterinary services and housing and is providing assistance to the country's disabled.

The Philippines faces challenge to stop deforestation

The Philippines may become the first Asian country to lose all of its forested land and tree-cover by the year 2000. The forecast was made by UNDP's resident representative in the Philippines, Kevin McGrath, while on a visit to UNDP headquarters in New York during the last week of May. "This is a serious environmental challenge for the Philippines, and UNDP is working with the government to help avert this possibility."

Population pressures and unsustainable logging practices have led to the precipitous decline in tree-covered land in the Philippines, which by some estimates has fallen from levels of about 60 to 70 per cent before the Second World War to 15 per cent today. UNDP is currently carrying out land-use management strategies and environmental impact assessments to help ensure the sustainable use and protection of remaining forested land.

While in New York, Mr. McGrath also spoke about other priority areas of UNDP's programme in the Philippines, including institution-building, policy-making and governance, promoting human development, and obtaining economic growth with equity. "We must make sure that economic growth in the Philippines, which has been healthy, does not come at the expense of social equity," Mr. McGrath said, adding that UNDP assisted in the preparation of the Poverty Alleviation Strategy for the Philippines, which will later provide the foundation for the country's Social Reform Agenda.

UNDP also helped to establish the Philippine Council for Sustainable Development, Mr. McGrath said, and is keenly involved in bringing together the country's many NGOs, private sector, government and church groups in an "upstream dialogue" on future development policy. In the crucial area of disaster management, which remains a top concern to the Philippines — a country which is hit by some 30 typhoons a year — UNDP continues to play an important coordinating role among donors in disaster management and response.

Senior Egyptian diplomat named Assistant Administrator of UNDP

Saad Alfarargi, Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Government of Egypt and a former Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations and UN official, has been appointed Assistant Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme and Director of UNDP's Regional Bureau for Arab States. He is expected to assume his new duties in August.

"Mr. Alfarargi brings to UNDP many years of experience in political and economic affairs, and will make a strong contribution to development in the Arab States and to UNDP overall," said James Gustave Speth, UNDP Administrator, in welcoming the new Assistant Administrator. UNDP is active in 19 Arab states, with projects and programmes in the region valued at more than $70 million.

Before taking his current post in the Egyptian government, Mr. Alfarargi was, from 1991 to 1994, Chief, Presidential Bureau for Economic Affairs in the Office of the Presidency. At the same time, he was a member of the Advisory Group to the Secretary-General of the UN on the World Summit for Social Development and was Inter-Ministerial Coordinator for Egypt on the Economic Summit for Regional Cooperation in the Middle East. From

1987 to 1991, he was Director-General for International Economic Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

At the United Nations, Mr. Alfarargi was Senior Political Officer, Centre for Disarmament, in the UN Department for Political and Security Council Affairs from 1977 to 1979. He served from 1983 to 1987 as Permanent Representative of Egypt to the UN in Geneva.

Mr. Alfarargi holds an MSc. in Political Science from Cairo University.

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Printed on recycled paper

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New York, NY 10017

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